

## Common Barn Owl

### *Tyto alba*

**Habitat Preference:** The Barn Owl is a savanna species that nests and roosts in dark, secluded places. Historically, it nested in tree cavities, specifically in silver maple, American sycamore, and white oak. Today, barn owls are often found roosting and nesting in old barns or abandoned buildings. Barn owls hunt in grassland habitats along field edges, fence-rows, and wetland edges where their favored prey is most available.



Photograph by: Bruce Ehresman

#### Threats:

- Loss of prey habitat:
  - Crop rotational changes from cover crops such as oats and hay to row crops like corn remove food and shelter for mice and voles; Barn-owls' primary prey.
  - Development of land, removal of hedgerows and draining of wetlands also has destroyed much of the Barn-owl habitat.
- Loss of nesting habitat:
  - Removal of large dead trees that provide good nest cavity sites reduces the number of possible nesting places.
  - Replacement of wooden barns and corncribs, where barn owls once nested, with modern metal farm buildings has reduced the number of available nest sites for barn owls.
  - Large scale removal of abandoned farm buildings and adjoining wood lots has also diminished nest sites.
- Great horned owl predation on barn owls is a major threat to this smaller owl's existence, since both species share similar habitats.
- Rodenticide use on farmsteads can cause poisoning of barn owls.

#### Appropriate Practices:

- Establish grassland habitat to attract prey.
  - Providing about 200 acres of quality grassland adjacent to a potential barn owl nest site can yield good results.
- Maintain old farmsteads with wooden barns, woodlots, and adjoining grasslands, especially if barn owls are known to frequent the area.
- Nest boxes can be used in place of cavity trees or abandoned buildings.
  - Placing predator-proof barn owl nest boxes in abandoned buildings can be especially effective.
- Minimize rodenticide use in areas known to have barn owl populations. Barn owls will act as natural control for many common pests.